

Testimony in support of HB-5397 and SB-477 to the Public Health Committee

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, ranking members Hwang, Somers and Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Peter Murchison and I live in Ridgefield.

I am also speaking today as a Quaker and a member of the Wilton (CT) Quaker Meeting. As a Quaker, we work for peace and we believe we need to work to eliminate the causes of violence in our communities.

Finally, I am here as part of a survivor family. My nephew, Daniel Barden, was shot and killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School. We know first hand the life long trauma that follows the murder of a family member.

I am testifying in support of HB-5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention because I believe that this act and SB-477 begin to get at the root cause issues we need to face about gun violence in CT.

Treating gun violence as a public health issue with open the doors to more strategies than just “gun control” measures. I am frankly hopeful that this could even lead to the de-politicization of gun violence prevention. Further it will surely lead to more research that will give citizens and legislators the facts needed to improve the trajectory of our solutions as time goes by.

With respect to Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention, CT has passed a number of laws to address gun violence. We are grateful for the progress made. But one place where we need to do more is community violence. The state hasn’t done enough in communities like New Haven, Bridgeport, and Hartford. The deaths in these communities don’t get the headlines that school shootings do but each life lost leads to the same trauma, the same pain that lasts a lifetime that we suffered after Sandy Hook.

CT needs grass roots organizations in these places to stop the cycle of gun violence by addressing it person to person, on the streets, in hospitals and in people’s homes. It takes very special people to do this work. And very special organizations to find, fund and foster those individuals. CT has a number of these organizations - let’s grow them. CT needs more of these organizations – let’s find, foster, and fund them. From a financial viewpoint, please note we are not looking to grow the number of state employees. The people that will do the on-the-ground work will work for these other organizations, but they do need state funding to grow their teams to accomplish what these communities deserve – a safer way of life.

In the name of equality, in the name of social justice, the state needs to support this work. It’s about time that the state takes action, not only to support these groups, but to make the statement that these communities matter. We’re all the same. There is “that of God” in everyone is how I would put it.

I believe that gun violence is so prevalent that it really is a public health issue. Further, I believe that creating and funding an Office of Gun Violence Prevention will be life saving in CT as it already has been in other states. CT more than most states knows the pain and lasting trauma of gun violence. My prayer and my request to you for your support this proposal. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Peter Murchison
Ridgefield, Connecticut